

July 10, 2011

Why Would God Create Us, Anyway by Katie Todd

OT: Psalm 139: 1-10, 13-18

NT: 1 John 4:9-16

In keeping with the theme of asking questions this summer, I thought I'd share with you a question that I was recently (well, a few months ago) asked when hanging out with "my kids" – the Philadelphia Youth. We spent several weeks tackling the creation stories in Genesis, discussing the "good" versus "evil" of creation and humanity, when the question came down: "So if we're just like ants in a magnifying glass to God, why would God create us anyway?" It was the youth director's version of the question that stumps the parent. Luckily, on my side that night was the time and the fact that our teenagers have a very healthy appetite...the clock struck 6:00, meaning it was time for supper! As luck would have it, Lee decided to preach a sermon series of "Questions Kids Ask" over the summer and asked me what I'd like to cover when I preached, so I decided I would finally answer this question – for "my kids" and for the rest of us, too.

The scripture we heard today is not quite the version of creation that we're used to when we think about answering a question about creation. Rather than taking the traditional route of Genesis 1 & 2, I decided to cut right to the heart of the matter. In short, God created us for relationships with God and others; all out of love. The 1 John passage talks about God's creation of humanity because, plainly put, God is love. Psalm 139 is a well-known psalm that speaks to the inescapable, protective natures of a creator God. We know from Genesis that everything God created was deemed "good," but here we see that God has an intimate hand in everything created, especially

humanity. Our God is a relational God, a God of compassion and love, and thus a God wanting intimate connection and community. God is love and God creates us out of love.

A few years ago when teaching a confirmation class here in Charlotte I was introduced to a particular episode of *Everybody Loves Raymond* that I had not seen. In this episode, Raymond's daughter Ally asks the "Why are we born?" and "Why does God put us here?" questions of her parents. All prepared for the sex talk, Raymond doesn't know how to answer these questions; he would actually rather have the sex talk with Ally than have to answer those questions. In an attempt, he tells her that "it's very crowded up in Heaven....remember when we went to Disney World, it was fun, but it was crowded...so God sends us down to earth for a little while to ease the heavenly congestion." Literally running from the room, he runs downstairs and asks Debra her answer, to which she has none. The whole family gets in on the action trying to answer the question, even flipping randomly through the Bible to find answers and finally calling the Priest for help. Rather than wanting to know "how" we get here, Ally wants to know "why"...Why does God create us and put us on earth. Eventually Ray & Debra head upstairs to answer the questions together but they can't find Ally in her room, rather she's in the room with her brothers wrestling and playing on the floor. It's at that moment, when Ray & Debra invite Ally to finish the conversation and she chooses to keep playing that they realize the reason we're here...for companionship with one another.

Relationships are hard. Knowing this, God sent Christ into the world to show us how to be in relationship with God and with each other. We have a God of love that shows us firsthand how to love and exactly who God is and who we are in relation to God. We are God's chosen. When we baptize a child,

our litany beings with “See what love the Father has for us, that we should be called children of God.” We are reminded further by John that although we have not seen God, if we love one another God lives in us and God’s love is made complete. We were made by God out of love to love one another – to roll on the floor laughing and giggling with our brothers as we tickle wrestle.

And because we are so loved by God, we are deemed “good” in our very creation. Our creator God does not see us as merely ants under a microscope or place us on earth to relieve heavenly congestion, rather our creator God lovingly knits us together in our mother’s wombs, knows all of our thoughts, establishes all of our days of our lives, and even says that it is not good for us to be alone and creates companions for us just as God did for Adam.

In a close reading of Psalm 139, James Mays notices that the Psalmist “speaks about self by speaking to God and speaks about God by speaking as a self. God and self are inextricably the subject of the psalm’s language.”ⁱ The psalm is an admiration of God’s involvement in the psalmist’s life despite God’s vastness; yet it also becomes a prayer of confession of his own accountability despite God’s presence in his life. The psalm becomes a prayer about knowing God only in part, but enough to know that the psalmist is already fully known by God; it is a prayer that all who make it their own prayer will come into the same knowledge of the reality of God in their life. Psalm 139 is a visual representation of the love that God has for us – love that means we cannot escape the presence of God, even at the farthest limits of the sea or making a bed in Sheol – we are too precious a creation and too deeply loved by God for God to not hold our left hands with his right hand so tightly that we won’t be let go.

While we are able to recognize that we are created good, in the image of God, and out of immense care and love, this creation comes with an

expectation. We know that we are created for God's pleasure to have a genuine relationship with God, but this does not mean that God would have been incomplete had we not been created. We have a God who seeks companionship with us out of a pure desire for relationship, not out of any sort of need from us. But we do have a God that delights in our joy and praise, and thus we are created to show God our gratitude for life, freedom and love.

Today's service alone is the perfect example of how we respond to the love God gives to us through creation. This morning we have already welcomed a new member into our church family, someone who has recognized God's call to community and has deemed Philadelphia as a home base to worship and praise God. We have also celebrated the Sacrament of Baptism, where we see the covenant relationship between God and humanity at work – where we see the outward sign of the amazing love that God has for us, for we are God's children and we are claiming that in being baptized and in baptizing our children. We have also collected our 10¢ A Meal Offering this morning, where we give freely of the bounty God provides in our lives to share Christ's love with those who don't have as much as we do. And in just a few more minutes, we will commission more than 30 of our youth and adults to represent Christ's love and God's call on our lives to mission work, study, learning, worship and fellowship with one another as they depart our campus and head out into ventures in Asheville, Montreat and Clinton, SC this month.

We are made in the image of God, as we learn in the first three chapters of Genesis; "let us make human-kind in our image, according to our likeness." But what exactly does that mean, and why would God create us to be in God's image? Being made in the image of someone or something does not mean you are an exact replica of that person or thing. Rather, it means that we have characteristics of the thing or being in our very nature. Being made in God's

image means that we have the nature of the Divine in our DNA...we carry God around in us...we mirror God in some way. Mirroring God and carrying God's nature in our being means that we represent God on earth in some shape or form – how exactly I'm not fully sure, but our 1 John passage tells us that it's through loving others and accepting God and Jesus as love. Michelle Bartel states that “human beings, alone of all God's creatures, are created out of the very imagination of the Divine, from deep inside God's heart and mind and soul. They are connected to the life of the Divine, yet distinct of it.”ⁱⁱ

Those of us that have parents or know anyone who has parents can see an earthly-representation of this creation in the parent-child relationship. Whether a person is a child through birth or adoption, they naturally adopt and inherit traits and mannerisms that represent the parent. The child bears the image of the parent. The lives of the parent and child are wrapped into one another to the point of feeling for and with the other. When the child hurts, the parent hurts along with the child. When the parent is happy, the child is (supposedly) happy along with the parent. Altogether, the child and parent are an extension of one another – an image of each other. Their lives are engrafted together, but their lives are two distinct lives. This is much like the relationship between our Creator God and God's earthly children – each one of us.ⁱⁱⁱ

As we remembered last week when we discussed our freedom and independence as a democratic nation, we also remembered our dependence upon God. We have been created as a free, independent race with complete reliance upon God because we cannot be humans without being dependent upon the One that created us. As odd as it sounds – free, independent beings, but dependent upon our creator – it's true because we are created out of God's imagination, in God's image, so therefore we rely upon God's imagination at

work in our lives to grant us the freedom of will and independence of choice. So why would God create us this way, especially since most parent's can't wait for the day when their child has claimed his or her stake at independence and branches out from the nest for good? Because it means that we are forever in relationship with the Divine, the God of love who created us out of pure love. And it is our responsibility, upon claiming that love that has claimed us, to respond accordingly.

Being made in someone's image means that we are connected to them, but it also means that we represent them. My mom is famous for constantly reminding me "remember who you are, and whose you are," especially when I venture into new territories of life. It's her way of reminding me that I am a child of God, and that I belong to God. In the same way, she is also reminding me that I am her child and that I belong to her and will *always* have a place in her heart and home, just as I will *always* have a place in God's heart and home. On a less sentimental note, it's *also* her sweet threat to say...you represent me, so don't embarrass me!

Psalm 139 reminds us well that we are intricately knit into God's being:

"O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up,
You discern my thoughts from far away...

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?
...Your hand shall lead me and your right hand shall hold me fast."^{iv}

1 John tells us of how we know God and the responsibility that accompanies such knowledge:

"Beloved, since God loved us so much,
we also ought to love one another.
No one has ever seen God; if we love one another,
God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.
By this we know that we abide in him and him in us...
God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God,

and God abides in them.”^v

We know that we can't escape God, for we carry God in our being since God knit us together in our mother's wombs, and we know that God abides in us when we experience love and share love. So how do we live lives that are worthy of this God of creation and abundance of love? We share the love that we have been given in creation, that we experience in the cross of Christ, and in which we are wrapped by the presence of the Spirit.

We joyfully sing “Jesus Loves Me” when we Baptize a child or when the children come forward for the children's sermons. We remember those without meals when we eat and we give our 10¢ to the offering. We welcome with open arms new members and delight in their presence, working to make them feel at home and called to be here. We commission youth to mission trips and retreats where they tangibly experience the love of God in community and service. We worship God through song and prayer not just on Sundays, but every day, and we experience for ourselves just why God has created us. We love, and in that love, we feel God and know that we are truly a special creation of God called to live, love, serve and worship.

At the end of our service today we will sing a hymn entitled “Take My Life.” I challenge us to re-consider the words to this familiar tune as we sing our praises, and make it a prayer to God. Ask God to take your life from you, back into God's hands, and guide you today, tomorrow, this week and in the next steps on this journey God has laid out for each one of us. Let us all ask God to re-claim our lives so that we may know exactly for what purpose we have been created; and in discovering that love and companionship, let us then ask God to help us go forth and share. When we depart from this place, let our time in community be the first of our experiences of worship for this

week. Let us never fail to glimpse the “Jesus that loves us, this we know” in the other person we notice while we are out in the world. And let us always freely give our hearts back over to God to be refilled with an indescribable love and immeasurable joy, remembering that it’s a gift for us to share and a platform for us to represent God.

“Remember who you are and whose you are!” For this, brothers and sisters, is why God would bother creating us anyway. We are not merely ants under a magnifying glass, rather we are God’s hands and feet in the world, representing God in all we do to everyone we meet. We are relational beings, designed to share Christ’s indescribable and unbelievable love. You are a child of God...remember that always, and most importantly, remember that when God created you, God claimed you to be Good and filled you with love in the image of the Divine.

To God be the glory, now and forever...Amen.

ⁱ Interpretation: Psalms, pgs. 421-430

ⁱⁱ *What it Means to Be Human: Living with Others before God*, Michelle J. Bartel, pg. 24

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, pg. 24.

^{iv} Psalm 139:1-2,7,10

^v 1 John 4:11-13a, 16b